

# “A different world” Exploring and understanding the climate of a recently re-rolled sexual offender prison

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## Introduction and Research Context

The use of rehabilitative interventions for criminal offenders has expanded over the decades and with it so has evidence exploring their effectiveness in reducing recidivism (Lipton, Pearson, Cleland, & Yee, 2002). For example, research has demonstrated that through targeting specific risk factors sex offender treatment programmes can reduce the number of sex offenders that are reconvicted (Hanson et al., 2002; Losel & Schmucker, 2005). Specifically, programmes which take a risk-need-responsivity approach have been found to be the most successful (Hanson, Morton, Helmus, & Hodgson, 2009). Furthermore, it is now internationally recognised that rehabilitative programmes have a demonstrable positive effect on recidivism rates (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

However, while there is much research into the risk factors of offenders and the specific changes offenders may demonstrate throughout their treatment, there is much less examining the context or situation within which treatment takes place. The prison climate, whether therapeutic (or not), and the attitudes of staff in that prison play a pivotal role in successful treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. Birgden (2004) has argued that such issues constitute an aspect of responsivity, which is both under-developed and seldom-researched. Indeed, there are growing concerns that rehabilitative programmes and practices are being compromised by ineffective correctional environments, staff drift, organisational resistance, degree of therapeutic integrity, and the quality of programme implementation (Day, Casey, Vess, & Huisy, 2012; Smith, Cullen, & Latessa, 2009).

At present, little is known about prison climate and its relationship with treatment processes and especially treatment gains. Conversely, a number of features in correctional facilities have been found to be detrimental to therapy (Woessner & Schwedler, 2014). Beech and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005), for example, found that therapeutic climate relates to treatment outcome and found that staff attitudes and clear goal-setting have an impact on treatment effectiveness. Similarly, Beech and Scott-Fordham (1997) found that the atmosphere of treatment groups had an important effect on treatment outcome. Group climate has been consistently found to improve treatment effectiveness (Marshall & Burton, 2010). Furthermore, the context within which treatment happens has been found to be more influential than actual treatment procedures (Marshall & Marshall, 2010). Indeed, the empirical evidence suggests that good prison social climate, other factors being equal, likely improves the outcomes achievable through evidence-based 'What Works' rehabilitation programs (Harding, 2014).

Relatedly, evidence from the therapeutic community (TC) literature highlights the importance of context and the environment for offender rehabilitation (see e.g. Jenson & Kane, 2012; Marshall,

1997). Jensen and Kane (2012) found that completing a sentence in a TC had a significant effect on reducing the likelihood of rearrest for prisoners. Marshall (1997) conducted a large-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of TCs for men who have committed sexual offences. In his 4-year follow-up, he found that 18% of treated offenders (with two or more previous convictions for sexual offences) were reconvicted, compared with 43% of untreated sexual offenders. Such environments have also been found to bolster treatment goals and contribute to prosocial modelling. TCs have been found to have a positive effect on self-identity and enable prisoners to construct positive identities (Miller, Sees, & Brown, 2006). They have also been found to improve quality of life for prisoners (Shefer, 2010), and prisoners are less likely to receive an adjudication in a TC prison (Newton, 1998). This has led some to argue that TCs, or at least environments that have an explicit therapeutic focus, are ideal for “doing” treatment with men who have sexually offended (Akerman, 2010; Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2009).

Understanding how men who have committed sexual offences experience prison and its environment is important because such experiences can impact on rehabilitation outcomes (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014; Day et al., 2012). In many jurisdictions, men who have committed sexual offences are often isolated for their own protection due to the dangers they face. In England and Wales, this often means segregation into ‘vulnerable prisoner units’ (VPUs) or transfer to prisons that deal predominantly with men who have committed sexual offences. Recently, there has been a move to co-locate men who have committed sexual offences, i.e. re-rolling prisons into sex offender-only sites. Despite the emergence of this strategy, there is a paucity of research that focuses on the prison climate of such prisons (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014), and no research has investigated the climate of a recently re-rolled prison. When prisons re-roll (i.e. the purpose/category of the prison changes, the residing prisoners are relocated, and new prisoners are brought in), there is an opportunity to capture the climate of the prison essentially at ground zero.

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the rehabilitative and therapeutic climate of a recently re-rolled prison that comprises of men who have committed sexual offences. The research therefore focuses on both prisoners’ and staff experiences and their perceptions of the prison, its regime and climate, and associate correlates of prison climate (attitudes towards prisoners, beliefs that prisoners can change, prisoners’ motivation to change). Understanding such experiences will add to current knowledge surrounding the risks and benefits associated with co-locating men who have committed sexual offences and will illuminate the type of prison climate most conducive for the rehabilitation of men who have offended sexually.

## **Research Aims and Methodology**

Utilising the perceptions of staff and prisoners, this research is focused on investigating the therapeutic and rehabilitative climate of a recently (6-8 months) re-rolled category B sexual offender prison. It aims to examine the underlying processes of the rehabilitative climate at the prison as such climates can drive positive rehabilitative environments and impact on positive outcomes. This research is linked to the under-researched 'responsivity' principle of offender treatment (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010). This research has a number of overarching research questions and objectives:-

- 1) To investigate and explore the rehabilitative climate of a recently re-rolled prison for men who have committed sexual offences.
- 2) To investigate the perspectives of prisoners and staff on the purpose of the prison, its regime, and climate.
- 3) To investigate staff and prisoners' views on offender rehabilitation, attitudes towards offenders, and offender change.

### *Setting and Mixed Methods Design*

This study utilised a mixed methodology to explore the therapeutic climate of the prison. To this end, the results of this study are split into two main sections, the qualitative study and the quantitative study. The qualitative phase of the research explored prisoners' and staff views on the rehabilitative impact of the prison, staff-prisoner dynamics at the prison, and prisoner opportunities for personal development. The quantitative phase of the research examined the therapeutic and rehabilitative climate of the prison, attitudes towards sexual offenders, beliefs about prisoner change, and general wellbeing.

A positive aspect of such an approach is that it offsets the weakness of both qualitative and quantitative methods and can provide rich and detailed data that would not be possible through either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Specifically, this research used a convergent mixed-methods design to gain a more complete understanding of the research topic. The purpose of the convergent design is "to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic" to best understand the research problem (Morse, 1991, p. 122). This design is used when the researcher wants to triangulate the methods by directly comparing and contrasting quantitative statistical

results with qualitative findings for corroboration and validation purposes (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A convergent mixed-methods design is pragmatic in the sense that it is orientated toward exploring and solving problems in the “real world”; such a position reiterates that epistemologically and ontologically quantitative and qualitative research share many commonalities (Feilzer, 2010). The approach is also best suited for exploring under researched phenomena, as is the case in this research. The research also takes a case study approach, which is most useful when research wants to explore the richness of a phenomenon and the extensive context of that phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Indeed, deep exploration of even a single case can be more informative than knowing a little about 200 or 2,000 cases (Maruna & Matravers, 2007). Given that there is little research on the climate of sexual offender prisons and even less on investigating re-rolled prisons a case study approach is most appropriate.

### *Ethics*

This project received ethical approval from the relevant UK University’s Ethics Committee and project approval from the National Offender Management Service.

### *Quantitative Study*

The quantitative phase of the research assessed the therapeutic and rehabilitative climate of the prison from staff and prisoner perspectives. A series of measures were administered to assess and evaluate the climate of the prison, attitudes of staff towards the prisoners, staff and offenders’ beliefs in rehabilitation, and prisoners’ readiness to change. The measures were chosen due to hypothesised links with rehabilitative environment.

In the quantitative strand of the research, a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to prisoners around the different wings of the prison and 112 were returned (28% response rate). The programme support volunteers (offenders who have completed an SOTP) agreed to distribute the questionnaires to prisoner participants. Prison staff questionnaires were administered electronically via SurveyMonkey and emails were sent to every member of staff in the prison. The response rate for staff was 20%. The final sample comprised prisoners ( $n = 112$ ) and prison staff ( $n = 31$ ). As this prison was recently re-rolled and the research was taking place approximately 8 months after the re-roll it was a requirement that prison staff and prisoners had to have a minimum of 6 months of being at the prison. The mean age for prisoners was 43.40 ( $SD = 15.16$ , range = 22-79) and the mean age for prison staff was 34.81 ( $SD = 11.11$ , range = 22-60).

## Measures

**Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES)** (Schalast et al., 2008) – This is a measure of social and therapeutic climate in forensic settings. It consists of 17 items (15 items scored, 2 positively worded items not scored) and has been validated in forensic psychiatric and prison settings (see Day et al, 2012; Schalast et al, 2009; Howells et al, 2009). Participants indicate how much they agree with statements on a 5 point likert scale range from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The measure has a reliable 3 factor structure which consists of the subscales of ‘inmates’ cohesion’ (e.g., *The inmates care for each other*), ‘experienced safety’ (e.g. *Staff take a personal interest in the progress of inmates*). Higher scores on the EssenCES indicate a more positive social and therapeutic environment at the prison. The measure has been found in previous studies to have moderately strong internal consistency (see the results for further analysis of the measure’s internal consistency).

**Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders (ATS)** (Hogue, 1993) – This is a 32 item uni-dimensional scale for assessing attitudes towards sexual offenders consisting of items such as *sex offenders never change*. The scale repeatedly demonstrates good internal reliability rating with alphas ranging from 0.85 to 0.95 (see Nelson et al, 2002; Ferguson and Ireland, 2006; Proeve and Howells, 2006). Participants indicate how much they agree with statements on a 5 points likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores on the ATS are indicative of more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders.

**Individual theories of Offending Behaviour (Other)** – This is an amended version of Dweck’s domain-specific implicit theories of intelligence and personality (Dweck, 2000) and Gerber and O’Connell’s (2011) implicit theory of crime and criminality (self and other). The scale measures the degree to which participants believe their offending behaviour is changeable (incremental) or fixed (entity). This 6 item measure consisting of statements such as *Anybody can change their offending behaviour*. The internal consistency of the six items comprising the measure was computed using Cronbach’s alpha. The results showed the measure had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .858$ ).

**Victoria Corrections Treatment Readiness Scale (VCTRS)** (Casey et al, 2007) – This is a 20 item measure designed to assess readiness for treatment in offenders and consists of 4 subscales (attitudes and motivation; ‘emotional reactions’, ‘offending beliefs’, and ‘efficacy’; see Casey et al, 2007). It contains items such as *treatment programmes are for wimps*. Participants indicate how much they agree with statements on a 5 points likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). The measure and subscales have been found to yield acceptable-good levels of internal reliability (Casey et al, 2007).

### ***Qualitative Study***

Data for this research stems from a total of 24 interviews comprising of prisoner (n= 12 containing n=6 untreated<sup>i</sup> and n=6 treated sex offenders) and staff (n=12, containing n=3 senior management and n=9 prison officers) interviews. It is noteworthy that a final sample of n=24 is considered large in qualitative research (Willig, 2008). The interviews for both prisoners and staff focused on the following areas.

- Purpose of the prison, prison life, prisoner interaction and regime
- Rehabilitative ideals/orientation of the prison
- Opportunities for personal development and access to constructive outlets for prisoners

Prison staff were recruited through e-mail and an internal poster advertisement within staff briefings. This sample included senior management (n=3) and prison officers (n=9), who were purposely selected to gain insight into a mixed array of staff positions and their experiences at the prison. Similarly, prisoners were recruited through posters and contact details left on all wings of the prison and snowball sampling. Participant information for prisoners and staff is detailed in table 1 and table 2 respectively.

[insert table 1 here]

[insert table 2 here]

All interviews in this research were semi-structured and lasted between 60-90 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to discuss issues of central concern to both themselves and the research topic. This interviewing style is flexible and allows participants the freedom to elaborate on personally important issues. In order to facilitate discussion, all questions were kept open (Knight, Wykes, & Hayward, 2003). This style of interviewing also enables “rapport to be developed; allows participants to think, speak and be heard; and are well suited to in-depth and personal discussion” (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, p. 22). As this research used in-depth interviews, steps were taken to minimise researcher bias. First, questions were open-ended and designed to be nondirective, allowing participants to describe their experience in their own words without the views of the researcher imposed on them. In addition, participants’ own words are used to describe the phenomena of this investigation (Phillips & Lindsay, 2011).

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data. It aims to capture rich detail and interpret the range and diversity of experience within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has been described as a “contextualist method,” sitting between the two poles of constructionism and realism. This position thus acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, thus, the analysis is seen as reflecting “reality” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This epistemological position was seen as important when triangulating data with the quantitative data. The analysis adhered to the principles of qualitative thematic analysis as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data analysis commenced with detailed readings of all the transcripts, then initial coding of emergent themes, through to detailed sorting of initial patterns, through to isolating meaningful patterns, and interpreting those patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were organised systematically and themes were identified and reviewed, with the final themes being representative of the participants. A type of interrater reliability was undertaken, with the analysis being “audited” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by the co-authors as well as an independent researcher to ensure the interpretations had validity.

### **Quantitative Results**

#### **Essen Climate Evaluation Schema (EssenCES)**

Descriptive statistics for the EssenCES scores are presented in Table 3. As can be noted staff scored higher on the Inmate Cohesion and Hold and Support subscales while prisoners had higher scores on Experienced Safety. Comparatively the prisoner scores are below average particularly for ‘hold and support’ (prisoner and staff relationships) and prison climate total scores.

**[insert table 3 here]**

A one-way between groups MANOVA was performed to assess the difference between staff and prisoner opinions on therapeutic and social climate. The dependent variables were the EssenCES subscales (Inmate Cohesion, Experienced Safety, Hold and Support) and the total EssenCES score. A statistically significant main effect with a large effect size was found between prisoner and staff on combined dependent variables,  $F(3, 106) = 5.57, p = .001$ , Wilks’ Lambda = .86,  $\eta^2 = .14$ . Examination of the univariate effects using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .013 showed a



significant result for the Hold and Support subscale,  $F(1, 108) = 12.80, p = .001, \eta^2 = .11$ , indicating that staff have a more positive view of prisoner and staff relationships and of the prison climate overall.

### **Attitudes to Sex Offenders (ATS)**

Descriptives are shown below in table 4 for the 36 item ATS. Total scores were calculated using the coding from the original author (Hogue, 1993).

[insert table 4 here]

An independent  $t$  test found that staff had significantly less positive attitudes towards sex offenders,  $t(109) = 2.20, p = .03$ . However, the high mean scores on both groups indicate that both prisoners and staff endorse very positive views towards men who have committed sexual offences. This is a very positive result as positive attitudes towards sexual offenders have been found to influence beliefs about rehabilitation.

### **Implicit Theories of Offending Behaviour Scale (ITOB-Other)**

A total score for the ITOB scale was computed by reverse coding questions 4, 5, and 6, before summing scores on questions 1 to 6. The mean was derived by dividing the total score by six. Mean scores of 5 and above indicate strong incremental beliefs regarding offender behaviour (Dweck, 2000). Descriptive statistics for these scores are presented in Table 5.

[insert table 5 here]

An independent  $t$  test conducted between prisoner and staff scores found that prisoners had stronger beliefs regarding change in offender behaviour compared to staff,  $t(109) = 2.2, p = .03$ . However, the mean scores demonstrate that both prisoners and staff endorse beliefs that prisoners can change. Scores over 5 are indicative of high incremental beliefs (Dweck, 2000)

### **Qualitative Results**

The thematic analysis revealed three superordinate themes and several associated subordinate themes that are interconnected and overlapping (see Table 6).

[insert table 6 here]

As there is limited research capacity to unpack each subordinate theme, this section will instead focus on unpacking the first two superordinate themes as these were the most relevant to the aims

of the paper. Prisoner and staff extracts are presented together to reflect a holistic analytical approach.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Superordinate Theme 1: Prisoner-Staff Dynamics**

Embedded within and recurrent across all data extracts is the way prisoners and staff interacted with each other in this recently re-rolled prison for men who have committed sexual offences. The impact of which is explored in subordinates of *'Experiencing a Different World'* and *'Relational Ambivalence'*.

#### *Experiencing a 'Different World'*

There was a general consensus amongst both prisoners and staff that the prison environment created a unique living experience. Such perspectives appeared to emerge primarily from the generally positive, respectful way in which prisoners and staff interacted with each other, which gave the impression of being in a 'different world'.

#### Extract 1 Prisoner Participant 5

*"Have I really come from that world to this? It really is a different world to what I've experienced before"*

Staff associating with prisoners, addressing prisoners by first name, and saying goodnight when locking up for the evening were perceived as unusual; many participants made comparisons to life in previous prisons to highlight how different staff-prisoner relations are in this prison. Some participants referred to prisoner-staff relations as 'just like any prison', but they appeared to be in the minority.

#### Extract 2 Prisoner Participant 4

*"Then when you came on the wing. Yer they're all helping ya this that and the other. And then I was sat down at one of the tables, just on me own, and an officer came and sat at the other side of the table and said "how you doing Mr (name removed), everything alright?" And I's just like blown away, because err you didn't get that at [xxx], that were no, they'd treat you like shit"*

Extract 3 Prisoner Participant 2

*"I was asked quite politely 'Would you like?' and that was the big thing 'Would I like?' erm it gives me the decision to make y'know without any pressure or nothing 'Would you like?' and because of that I believe that made me more prone to want to engage"*

Extract 2 illustrates the surprise at being treated in a decent manner and it was often difficult for participants to adjust to this new prison environment. Being "blown away" emphasising how qualitatively different this experience was to previous establishments. One prisoner (prisoner participant 5) described his disbelief at the genuineness of staff and the surreal nature of coming from 'that world to this'. Despite needing time to adapt, these positive social interactions made prisoners feel more human and it allowed them to express themselves freely without fear of being 'deliberately misconstrued'. Extract 3 alludes to this idea of choice and responsibility that was afforded to prisoners in their decision-making. This particular interaction, where the participant was asked a non-directive question by a member of staff, thus shifting personal responsibility and choice, appears to have been a critical turning point in regards to treatment engagement, the impact of which is reflected in the amount of times the participant repeats said question in his narrative. This links with findings from previous research that highlights the importance of positive everyday staff-prisoner interactions in a rehabilitative environment (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Molleman & Van Der Broek, 2014). This also links to a recent positive evaluation of the Five Minute Intervention where prison staff were trained to interact with prisoners in a manner that targets poor motivation to change and encourage personal responsibility (Tate, Blagden, & Mann, in press). Prisoners and staff on the wings appeared to have developed a cohesive environment whereby mutual respect was upheld. Again the majority of participants perceived this as a unique experience.

Extract 4 Staff Participant 7

*"I think if you walked on to any wing you'd see staff having a laugh with prisoners chatting, sitting down and helping them with their paperwork and there is that kind of sort of we walk amongst them rather than being sort of kept away"*

Extract 5, Prisoner Participant 7

*I just went wow... you're talking to me like I was just a normal person, not a prisoner... and that helps, made me feel a bit better. It were weird just being treated normal.*

In comparison to other prisons, the positive relationship between staff and prisoners in this establishment was perceived as being quite unique as many participants had not previously experienced this interaction and felt like staff were more approachable and willing to help them. This aspect of prison life is particularly important for men who have committed sexual offences as they are a widely stigmatised population (Tewskbury, 2012), thus it is vitally important to foster effective prisoner and staff relationships in facilitating change in sexual offenders (Molleman & van der Broek, 2014). The traditional idea of a 'them and us' culture was largely absent and interpersonal conflict only occurred in pockets, usually minor incidents. Cordilia (1983) explored the notion of an inmate code amongst prisoners, which consisted of a clear disassociation and mistrust of prison staff and loyalty to fellow inmates. However, recent research has suggested prisoner-staff relations have improved on the wings and prisoners rarely perceive prison staff as the enemy anymore (Crewe, 2009). Interestingly, as a side effect of this compliance, staff spoke of how this new respectful, cohesive environment was, at times, actually quite boring and in general, they (at times) preferred the dysfunctional and conflicting environment of mainstream prison.

### *Relational Ambivalence*

Interestingly, while participants were, on the whole, positive regarding staff and prisoner relations, these tended to be on a procedural level and the data pointed to a more ambivalent construal of prisoner and staff relationships. Participants alluded to not always believing prisoner-staff relationships were entirely genuine.

Extract 5 Prisoner Participant 9

*"it's just the staff just need to be themselves and if you can give it, be ready to take it, that's all but don't make somebody feel bad about themselves by pretending that you're there for them but you're not"*

In this extract, the participant suspected staff were only decent to put on a front and portray the prison in a positive light to the outside world. One prisoner (prisoner participant 9) described this as staff 'putting on a show'. The authenticity of prisoner-staff relations has been discussed in previous research and it is acknowledged that both prisoners and staff may forge artificial relationships out of self-interest (Crewe, 2011). Similarly, for prisoners who are used to a more hostile climate, as was the case for many of the prisoner participants in this study, it can be harder to overcome the levels of mistrust they developed in those environments (Crewe, 2011). However, cultivating meaningful and genuine relationships with men who have committed sexual offences is possible and can be an important aspects of the self-change process (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014). However, the fact that the prison was now occupied by men who have committed sexual offences was having an effect on prisoner-staff interactions, particularly in forming personal-professional relationships.

Extract 6 Staff Participant 12

*I don't check up on their records I don't want to know what they are in for, if they flag up as a prisoner of interest that they're dangerous then I'll have look at what the threat is, but I don't go through the person's records, because I need to treat the person in front of me, if I knew if the person in front of me had raped 10 kids I'm gonna have a different attitude towards him and I can't, so I don't check their records, I just make sure the ones that are dangerous are on my radar*

Extract 7 Staff Participant 11

*I'm much more guarded than I used to be, when it was a mains I talk more to the prisoners and tell them more about me, I don't do that now, I don't share anything personal. You don't know how they will use it.*

There was a theme through some of the prison staff interviews which highlighted how prison staff reacted differently to men who have committed sexual offences. They were more guarded and

would not disclose personal information that they would have previously. Some, as in prisoner participant 12, would not look at why they were imprisoned because he felt it would affect how he interacted with the prisoner. A study from Lea et al. (1999) found that prison professionals' attitudes were, at times, in conflict. This conflict was labelled the professional-personal dialectical and stemmed from prison officers feeling pressured to form a bond with men who have committed sexual offences as part of their professional duties, whilst suffering internal conflict because of personal "disgust" and "disapproval" of the criminal activities of these individuals. They argue that this incongruence could lead to more punitive attitudes and behaviours from prisoner officers, which can have deleterious impacts on treatment. This incongruence appeared to be occurring in this prison. However, prison participants felt that after a period of readjustment, relationships between prisoners and staff were on the whole trusting, respectful and unlike anything experienced before. Furthermore, linked to this relational ambivalence was the beliefs that prison staff had on whether prisoners could change. These beliefs appeared linked to the relational barrier that some staff had.

#### Extract 8 Staff Participant 12

*Interviewer: Do you think prisoners in this prison have the capacity to change?*

*Respondent: Na na No err it's all a game, it's all a game. The ones that are engaging they are just doing it to get out, IPPs [Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection] and all that, they are only doing it because it will get them out...I don't know anyone who has said genuinely that they are sorry for what they've done. In my opinion they don't want to change...*

*Interviewer: OK if they can't change, what's the best outcome for this prison in terms of making a difference...*

*Respondent: I don't know how to put it. It's all too soft, they need a shock an awakening to make them see the effects of what they did, at the moment it's all on a piece of paper, you know, you did this to little Jimmy, how do you feel? "I feel terrible". They need to see what they've done, maybe more get to meet more victims or family members or things like that*

#### Extract 9, Staff Participant 1

*My opinions on rehabilitating offenders are pretty negative anyway, I think people can be taught how to maybe hide their behaviour, hopefully taught not to do it even though they want to do it... but I don't think you can change the way someone thinks.*

Extract 8 and 9 are important as they demonstrate that not all staff believe that men who have committed sexual offences can be rehabilitated despite this being the fundamental goal of the prison. Here the prison staff participants are construing men who have committed sexual offences as Machiavellian and not genuinely being able to change. This is an important finding as there is a body of research that highlights the importance of pygmalion effects (high expectation produces higher outcome) and interpersonal expectancy effects on prisoner outcomes (Lebel et al., 2008). Maruna et al. (2009), for example, argue that self-change occurs not only through self-appraisals and attributions but also from the reactions and reflected appraisals of others. In order for rehabilitation to be successful staff and prisoners needed to believe in change. However, the sentiment of men who have committed sexual offences not being able to change was a somewhat minority view from all participants.

## **Superordinate theme 2: Rehabilitative Barriers**

The theme 'Rehabilitative Barriers' refers to aspects of the prison environment that appear to diverge from the prison's overall purpose and restrict rehabilitative progress. Subordinate themes that will be discussed in this analysis will include 'Cultural Divergence' and 'Negative Stereotypical Attitudes'.

### *Cultural Divergence*

An important theme that was emergent across all data was this notion of separate, conflicting cultures embedded within the prison environment. Although there was a clear consensus that the prison was striving to be a treatment-focused prison, these cultural clashes appeared to detract from the prison's rehabilitative aim. Put simply, prisoners and staff were culturally divided into those who were programme orientated, and those who were not.

Extract 9 Prisoner Participant 1

*you've got two cultures in this prison. The people that are on courses... then you've got the people who are just trying to do their time (prisoners)*

Extract 10 Prisoner Participant 1

*some people are here because they need to pay the mortgage. Some people are here because they are interested in rehabilitation (staff)*

The rehabilitative orientated culture appeared, to some extent, to reside with the arrival of newer staff, and the influx of new prisoners who had purposely been brought in to do programmes. In this sense, such cultural divergence, whether anticipated or not, seemed to be a possibly natural side effect of the recent re-roll. Participants commented on how more support was needed for prisoners engaging in programmes when they returned to the wing environment due to programme intensity and self-disclosure.

Extract 11 Prisoner Participant 3

*they need a bit more support on the wings coz it will affect how they are feeling and... so if there's more support on the wing, more people they could go and talk to...or...erm...more people that notice it then it will be a much easier environment*

Staff who adopted the programme-orientated culture were able to provide such support. Some staff however did not appear interested in this culture. They tended to approach their role objectively and display dismissiveness in regards to what the programmes department do. The importance of time spent outside of treatment sessions has been discussed within the literature (see Frost & Connolly, 2004). The progress prisoners make within treatment sessions can be encouraged and maintained whilst in the wider prison environment (Ware et al., 2009). Through this divergent staff culture, the prison did not appear to be maximising treatment effectiveness outside of group, or maintaining a supportive environment.

Extract 12 Staff Participant 4

*The way I see it, it's just like working in a bar, instead of throwing them out, you lock them up at the end of the night*

Extract 13 Staff Participant 5



*I don't necessarily associate with programmes, I don't get involved with programmes, I'm not really interested in programmes, because personally, from the experience that I've got, a prisoner will only stop being a prisoner when he decides to do it, no matter what his crime*

The transferability of programme awareness onto the wing environment then is something that emerged as important for the prison moving forward. There was a perceived need for the prison as a whole to 'read from the same hymn sheet' where a rehabilitative culture is promoted from 'all angles of the prison'. Without this joined up approach, staff divides are increasingly likely and the therapeutic progress of prisoners is thus restricted. Blagden et al. (2014) found that close working relationships between programmes, OMU and wing staff were vital for the rehabilitative culture of the prison. Indeed, this sentiment was echoed by some of the prison staff participants.

Extract 14 Prison staff participant 9

*If we could know who works in programmes, have a closer a relationship, if they came onto the wing more. If I said to you "can you see so and so tomorrow", come and see rather than put in a general app. It used to be better with the mains, we trusted each other more, there's no trust...We don't get told anything from programmes, they don't tell us anything he's progressing well or he's had a bad session...I've no idea about sex offender programmes, all I know is that they sit around in groups and talk about their offences and how err it effects people.*

There appeared both a greater need of awareness of sex offender treatment programmes and greater inter-departmental working. Extract 14 highlights how there is some mistrust between departments and this seemed more focused on programmes. There perhaps is the need for a greater working relationship between the departments which would help to facilitate the goal of creating a rehabilitative climate conducive to personal change. However, it is worth noting that this represents the prison early in the re-roll process and this may well change over time as the culture of the prison changes.

### *Negative Stereotypical Attitudes*

It is well documented within the literature about the existence of a prisoner hierarchy, where men who have committed sexual offences are placed firmly at the bottom (Guy, 1992). In mainstream prisons, this results in sex offenders' being accommodated separately in vulnerable wings for protection (Guy, 1992). There was a unanimous belief amongst prisoners and staff that, despite being a prison for men who have committed sexual offences, such a hierarchy still existed.

#### Extract 15 Staff Participant 7

*"I thought when it's all sex offenders it would be a more level playing field but there seems to be different levels of offences so child sex offenders are sort of the lowest of the low and other prisoners look down on them for that so if they've raped an adult they're somehow not as dirty as...so they actually even make comments that are sort of like nonce and things like that to the ones who have child sex offences, which is sort of bizarre to us as staff because they've all committed a sexual offence and we've sort of classed them as all the same"*

Extract 15 alludes to a sex offender hierarchy within a prison for men who have committed sexual offences. While some prisoner and staff participants alluded to all prisoners "being the same", there was evidence that a specific sexual offender hierarchy existed (see Waldram, 2007; Schwaebe, 2005). Participants spoke of prisoners openly calling out or refusing to share cells with others who they believed were below them in the chain. Similarly, some prisoner participants spoke of not wanting to do programmes if people who committed offences against children were also present. However, this notion of prison hierarchy was contested and not experienced by everyone uniformly within the prison.

#### Extract 16 Prisoner Participant 4

We're all the same here, so you don't get that hiding the offence, don't get the same anxiety really...there's hardly any disturbances here, its quiet man

There was a strong theme that the prison had few disturbances and that in the main prison conflict was minimal and usually orientated towards the younger prisoners. One prisoner (prisoner

participant 3) described this tolerance as 'birds of a feather' where prisoners 'flocked' towards those of similar age or offence type to form different social groups. In this way, although prisoners were less integrated, prisoners felt safer and the environment itself appeared to be settled.

Interestingly, despite their moral exclusion of others, some prisoners felt themselves stigmatised by staff and many complaints staff received included the question 'is it because I'm a sex offender?'

#### Extract 17 Staff Participant 2

*"I had actually a complaint last week off a prisoner where he put 'is it because we're sex offenders?' it was over a fence not opening one night when it was really hot"*

Levens and Crewe (2015) from their research on a category C prison for men who have committed sexual offences concluded that in this environment, sex offenders are both "labellers and labelled". This notion was also found in this prison. As illustrated in extract 17, although prisoner complaints often appeared trivial, the prospect of being labelled appeared to be a considerable source of frustration. Sometimes the question of 'is it because I'm a sex offender' appeared to be a self-reflection of internalised feelings from the prisoner. However, the issue of labelling and being labelled is important because prisoners who are labelled within their prison environment are more likely not to 'make good' in the community (Maruna et al., 2009). Furthermore, such stereotypical labelling contradicts the notion of being treated like a human being.

Although staff collectively professed to treating sex offenders' the same as they would any prisoner, it emerged from the interviews that at times, stereotypical attitudes crept in.

#### Extract 18 Staff Participant 9

*"some staff have suddenly decided to grow a pair of b\*\*\*\*, err the ones that wouldn't challenge mainstream prisoners, erm all of a sudden they started to get brave and started fronting out sex offenders who are more compliant and more of an elderly population and not as violent and fractious as mainstream prisoners erm so that's a frustration"*

In this extract, the staff member seemed confused as to why a more compliant population were challenged more frequently and suspected it was because of preconceived judgements. Sexual

offender stereotyping has been regarded as causing bigger issues when it indirectly influences professional practice (Lea, Auburn, & Kibblewhite, 1999). While in the minority, some staff in this prison appeared to be letting stereotypical attitudes interfere with their role, which resulted in a population that, at times, felt harshly treated. This may go some way to explaining why prisoners referred to their label as a “sex offender” when making complaints. Furthermore, some staff were unaware of prisoners’ offence details, which appeared to be through choice. There was a sense of ambivalence amongst staff in that although the majority wanted to help, they refrained from learning the specific nature of offenders’ crimes. Again, this may detract from the prison’s rehabilitative purpose as it is likely to be harder to support prisoners through a rehabilitative process without knowing the nature of their offending behaviour.

## **Discussion and Implications**

This study aimed to explore the climate of a recently re-rolled prison for men who have committed sexual offences, through the perspectives of both staff and prisoners. In exploring the importance of the wider prison environment in rehabilitating sexual offenders, a greater understanding of what can impact on treatment goals/gains can be understood. Furthermore, this study explores a novel context (a re-rolled prison for individuals who have sexually offended) and thus offers a unique insight into how prisoners and staff perceive such an environment.

It is clear that the prison explored within this study is striving to become treatment-focused and attempting to provide an environment conducive to personal change. However, despite such a purpose resonating across the prison, there are some areas for improvement and some lessons to be learned from the re-roll. This study has highlighted many strengths of the prison, particularly for one that has undergone major change within a short period of time. All participants expressed that they were experiencing this prison as a “different world”, one in which they were less anxious in and less fearful of being identified as a ‘sexual offender’. Consequently, they felt safer in their prison environment. This was an important finding, as research has found that prisoners who feel safe are more likely to secure meaningful roles throughout incarceration and more likely to engage in treatment and other pro-social activity (Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Blagden & Perrin, 2016). These findings sit in contrast to a broad body of research exploring traditional correctional settings, in which men who have committed sexual offences live under constant fear of attack and are often unable to address their offending behaviour in a safe and constructive environment (Schwaebe, 2005; Blagden & Perrin, 2016). Indeed, there are numerous limitations for treatment programmes

delivered in environments that men who have committed sexual offences perceive as unsafe (see Schwabe, 2005). This feeling of experiencing a different environment appears to be especially important for men who have committed sexual offences, who often experience multiple stigmas that inhibit their personal change processes (and can lead to treatment refusal) (Mann et al., 2013).

The research also featured repetitive excerpts relating to strong beliefs that prisoners could change and attitudes towards sexual offenders were generally positive and rehabilitation-oriented. Such beliefs and attitudes have been described as crucial in effective treatment environments (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). The ATS scores from both prison and staff are among the highest scores published (Hogue, 2009; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). Importantly, the ATS has been linked to therapeutic effectiveness and therapeutic alliance (Hogue, 2009), which is linked to positive treatment outcome (Serran, Fernandez, Marshall, & Mann, 2003). These are important findings as previous research has found that the attitudes held by professionals toward prisoners can have a profound effect on their practice (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012).

However, the overall climate of the prison was perceived as average, with some aspects below average for prisoners, though this could represent the state of transition from the re-roll. There were differences between prisoners and staff on how the prison was experienced, particularly with regard prison climate and prisoner and staff relationships. The qualitative data analysis explored this issue further and found that while prisoners felt safe in their environment and that the prison was qualitatively different to others they had experienced there were some issues regarding the perceived genuineness of the relationships. There was a relational ambivalence in terms of how some prisoners experienced prisoner-staff relationships and equally a guardedness which stemmed from the prisoners being men who have committed sexual offences. This manifested itself with prison staff disclosing less personal information or not having the same relationships as previously with 'mains' prisoners. This was being experienced by some prisoners as inauthentic or 'putting on a show'. Interestingly, one of the items of the EssenCES asks prisoners whether "staff know my personal history well". In the qualitative analysis there were prison staff who actively avoided knowing the personal histories of the prisoners and this relational ambivalence may account for some of the low scores regarding prisoner and staff relationships. Crewe (2011) has raised the question of whether prisoner-staff interactions can ever be authentic given the power dynamic between prisoners and staff. However, Blagden et al. (2014) found that prisoner and staff relationships can be genuine and that this is potentially important for helping to maintain treatment goals/gains. The therapeutic alliance is pivotal for effective treatment with a constructive relationship characterised by warmth, empathy, respect, rewarding behaviour, and genuineness. Prisoner and staff relationships are thus pivotally important in sexual offender prisons as such a

client group is widely stigmatised (Tewksbury, 2012) and can act as testing grounds for social interactions post-release. The expectations and beliefs of prison staff about prisoners are important. There is consistent research on the pygmalion effects and interpersonal expectancy effects on prisoner outcome (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). Maruna et al., (2009) argued that the pygmalion effect (high expectation produces higher outcome) is important for offender rehabilitation; specifically, that self-change occurs not only through self-appraisals and attributions but also from the reactions and reflected appraisals of other.

## **Conclusion and Limitations**

A prison's climate is a potentially vital "responsivity" factor for an offender's rehabilitation and so getting the treatment setting and staff characteristics right is crucial for establishing an effective rehabilitative environment (Birgden, 2004). This research has added to the emerging body of knowledge surrounding the importance of the wider prison environment on sexual offender rehabilitation and on the benefits and risks of co-locating men who have committed sexual offences in the same prison site. Recent national offender management policy in England and Wales has seen an increase in re-rolled sexual offender sites and this research has important implications for the management of such re-rolls and the impact on prisoners. While prisoners were unanimous in that the prison was experienced as safe and positively as "a different world", there was ambivalence in terms of the nature of the prison and staff relationships. The data in this regard pointed to some of the difficulties prison staff face when working exclusively with men who have committed sexual offences.

While this research adds incrementally to the emerging body of knowledge, there are some limitations. This research is novel in that it examines a recently re-rolled prison site, however the research presents a case study and only offers a snapshot of how this prison is experienced. It would be useful to examine longitudinal changes in a re-rolled sexual offender prison in order to explore climate changes over time and what impacts on perceptions of climate.

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<sup>i</sup> Untreated refers to participants who have not any form of accredited programmes. The participants may have been on waiting lists for treatment but were not currently undergoing treatment.